

COLOMBIA: IN FOCUS

A WEEKLY UPDATE FROM THE EMBASSY OF COLOMBIA

February 18, 2011

Did You Know...

New Report Underscores Importance of FTA to U.S. Export Growth, Reinforcing Colombia's Progress

On Tuesday, February 15, the CATO Institute released a policy brief titled, "Trade Agreement Would Promote U.S. Exports and Colombian Civil Society." The report outlines the many benefits of the U.S.-Colombia FTA, and concludes:

"A free-trade agreement with Colombia would achieve a number of worthy U.S. policy objectives. An agreement would reduce significant barriers to U.S. exports to a major Latin American market, moving the United States closer to meeting President Obama's goal of doubling U.S. exports by 2014.

It would remove uncertainty over Colombia's access to the U.S. market, aiding that country's efforts to develop its economy and reduce poverty. And it would strengthen civil society in Colombia, reinforcing the efforts of the country's new reform-minded government to reduce violence even further and to bolster the nation's already robust democracy...

Such an agreement would 'keep faith' not only with American workers but also with our national interest in promoting peace and prosperity in our own hemisphere."

To read the report, visit <http://tinyurl.com/6zsjqupb>.

Inside Colombia

Ambassador Welcomes Administration's Intent to Advance FTA, Comments on False Claims about Labor Rights in Colombia

In a statement released following a House Ways and Means Committee hearing on the U.S. trade agenda held on February 9, Colombian Ambassador to the U.S. Gabriel Silva stated:



"Over the past few weeks, the Administration has expressed its commitment to the FTA, and we are pleased that there is a willingness to advance the agreement."

During the hearing, some policymakers expressed concerns about labor and human rights in Colombia. In his statement released after the hearing, the Ambassador said: *"...[W]e reject the notion that Colombia has done little to make progress on these critically important issues. To suggest that Colombia has stood idly by and not taken aggressive steps to protect human and labor rights, and enhance union rights and the rule of law, are claims not based on current facts. Often it is convenient to leverage old arguments based on Colombia's past, but the Colombia of today is a different nation, and it is time for Colombia to receive a fresh assessment and recognition based on that reality."*

To read the Ambassador's full statement, visit <http://tinyurl.com/4r4zfqq>.

What's News

Senate Finance Committee Leaders Call on USTR to Take Action on Colombia FTA

In a letter sent to U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk on Monday, February 14, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus and Ranking Member Orrin Hatch wrote, "We share your goal of opening export markets for U.S. workers. We believe one of the most effective ways to achieve that goal is through approval of our pending trade agreements with Panama and Colombia....Panama and Colombia both made clear commitments to eliminate these barriers and open their markets, but the Administration has not taken action that would allow U.S. exporters to benefit from these commitments." The letter, which confirmed that Kirk will testify before the committee during a March 9 hearing, also requested that he come prepared to discuss a "clear and expeditious timetable for moving both agreements through Congress." To read the letter, visit <http://tinyurl.com/4e8jsc3>.

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